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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 002059

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON
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STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: TIP REPORT: GOV REACTS INDIGNANTLY

REF: CARACAS 1998

CLASSIFIED BY: MARK A. WELLS, ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR, FOR REASONS 1
.4(B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

1. (U) NUMEROUS GOV OFFICIALS RESPONDED WITH INDIGNATION AND CONDEMNATION TOWARD THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S 2004 TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP) REPORT, WHICH LISTED VENEZUELA AS A TIER 3 COUNTRY. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY ACCUSED THE U.S. OF SERIOUS TRAFFICKING AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OF ITS OWN. GOV AND PRO-GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ASSAILED THE REPORT AS PART OF A USG ANTI-CHAVEZ CAMPAIGN IN THE LEAD-UP TO THE AGUUST 15 REFERENDUM. WHILE THE REACTION WAS FORCEFUL, IT WAS SOON OVERTAKEN BY THE RELEASE OF THE JUNE 17 HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH REPORT ON THE POLITICIZATION OF VENEZUELA'S JUDICIARY. END SUMMARY.

GOV CONDEMNS, DENIES, AND ACCUSES

2. (U) GOV OFFICIALS AND MEDIA SOURCES CONDEMNED THE TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP) REPORT, CHALLENGED ITS LEGITIMACY, AND ACCUSED THE USG OF USING THE REPORT IN ITS "DIRTY WAR" TO UNSEAT PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ. ON A STATE-SUPPORTED NEWS WEBSITE, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY RESPONDED TO THE TIP REPORT WITH A PRESS STATEMENT CLAIMING THAT "THE U.S. IS THE LARGEST TRAFFICKER IN PERSONS." THE RESPONSE ACCUSED THE U.S. OF TRAFFICKING LATIN AMERICAN CHILDREN FOR PROSTITUTION AND AGRICULTURAL LABOR, NOT SIGNING INTERNATIONAL TREATIES PROTECTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS (E.G. UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD), AND PRODUCING THE LARGEST AMOUNT OF CHILD PORNOGRAPHY. BERNARDO ALVAREZ, VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR TO U.S., SAID THAT VENEZUELA WOULD NOT ACCEPT THE USG'S SELF-APPOINTED ROLE AS GLOBAL JUDGE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS.

3. (U) DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER AREVALO MENDEZ ACCUSED THE USG OF USING THE TIP REPORT TO UNSEAT PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ. MENDEZ SAID THAT THE REPORT IS THE WORK OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND CIA, WHO RELEASED THE REPORT TO "PREJUDICE OUR COUNTRY, IN ITS ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE AUGUST 15 REFERENDUM." MENDEZ DESCRIBED THE REPORT AS AN AGGRESSION TOWARD CHAVEZ AND THE GOV, LIKENING IT TO THE USG'S ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN THE EVENTS OF APRIL 11, 2002. MENDEZ FUMED THAT THE "INSANITY OF THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAS REACHED AN EXTREME."

4. (U) TAREK WILLIAM SAAB, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S FOREIGN POLICY COMMITTEE, COMMENTED ON THE HIGH U.S. PROSTITUTION RATE, PARTICULARLY CHILD PORNOGRAPHY, BUT DIRECTED MUCH OF HIS CRITICISM TOWARD THE USG PLOT TO REMOVE CHAVEZ. SAAB DESCRIBED THE TIP REPORT AS PART OF AN OPEN, HOSTILE USG CAMPAIGN DESIGNED TO "DISTORT THE VENEZUELAN REALITY AND FACILITATE AN UNCONSTITUTIONAL RESOLUTION." SAAB STATED THAT THE USG "WANTS TO USE AND MANIPULATE A TOPIC AS SENSITIVE AS THIS TO CONDUCT A DIRTY WAR AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ IN THE MIDDLE OF A REFERENDUM PROCESS."

5. (C) VICE PRESIDENT JOSE VINCENTE RANGEL ALSO RAISED THE ISSUE WITH THE AMBASSADOR IN THEIR MEETING ON JUNE 16 (SEE REFTTEL). RANGEL CITED THE TIP REPORT AND ASKED RHETORICALLY HOW LONG USG ATTACKS ON THE GOV WILL CONTINUE, DIRECTLY CITING THE TIP REPORT. RANGEL COMPARED VENEZUELA'S TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS' SITUATION TO COLOMBIA AND BRAZIL, WHO RECEIVED BETTER RATINGS.
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